



JANET LEE

In the Shadow of the Gallows.

BY DAVID LOWRY.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"This not of him I was speaking. Would that all the world were like Master Lee."

"Who, then, of the Lees?"

"If you command me to speak plainly, I command nothing, nor can I, by virtue of my office, command any man. I simply execute the will of those in authority, as you well know. And I tell thee, Giles Ellis, I like not the duties of my office in ill times. God save us all from making more of our office than strict, even justice calls for in perilous seasons."

The Marshal of Salem exhibited more feeling than he had ever been known to reveal. Giles Ellis, too, looked very grave now.

"Since you speak so plain, Master Hobbs, I must even speak as plain in return, lest you misconstrue my meaning. And since you are a friend of John Lee's, all the more reason for plain speaking. It is said some of his family has dealings with the evil one."

"It is said," the Marshal repeated, in visible alarm. "Oh! on it come so close that 'tis said!"

"I do not say it of my own accord. 'Tis in friendship I say it. Neither can I say anything touching this of my own knowledge. I but do this to advise you in time, so you may prepare John Lee in case you are compelled to do your duty."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Marshal, greatly relieved; "so you know nothing more than idle rumor?"

"Nothing but what report says. 'Aye, but report, as you know well, may hang the best man in Salem. But I'll make a note of it, and I think thee, Giles Ellis, for a timely warning. And now, what is this rumor?"

The misfortune that befell John Winslow was in everybody's mouth. The Marshal of Salem was on the point of asking Giles if any of Lee's family were suspected or mentioned in connection with the monstrous cruelty, but Giles anticipated him.

"An it go no farther, it is said that if the truth were known some there are in John Lee's household who could explain how John Winslow's horse and lambs were killed."

"'Tis past belief," said the Marshal. "Miss Lee is as kind as any woman in Salem. Janet is as like her mother as any daughter of woman may be. 'Tis a thing past all belief."

"I am glad we are of one mind, Master Hobbs. But if the people will talk-aye, and if any accuse John Lee of harboring witches—"

"Why, then, I will say 'tis false. I will state my life on it."

"Easy, Master Hobbs."

"—Tis I have forgot. There is his apprentice—but there is no other force for the mid-it would go hard with me indeed to be compelled to take any of John Lee's household in charge."

"That I believe, and it does you credit," Giles E. is answered. "My interest in the welfare of the family is so great I could not forbear speaking to you."

"A very proper man, and a kinder than I had thought him," said the Marshal to himself when Giles Ellis passed on. "A very good citizen. I will do my best to defend John Lee from foolish and evil tongues. No harm shall come to him or his."

Pondering thus, the Marshal of Salem pursued his way, marveling at the evil times.

CHAPTER VII.
LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING FROM A CLEAR SKY.

Silence reigned in and about John Lee's house; the restful calm of a quiet, well-ordered, happy home prevailed. The old-fashioned clock in a high case, made by John Lee, ticked loudly, measuring the hours with a precision that seemed a characteristic of John Lee's movements, public or private. Whether at home or abroad, in all his dealings with the world, everything was done precisely, promptly, quietly.

A man of few words, save when speech was a virtue, no man in Salem had proved in time of need a man of action as plainly as John Lee.

Dorothea Lee and her daughter Janet met each other in the narrow passage to their sleeping apartment. The mother was on the point of speaking. Janet also seemed to be framing a speech, but before either found suitable words, John Lee's voice was heard, saying:

"Dorothea, it is time for worship."

Dorothea turned and entered the room where John Lee sat, saying to Janet:

"Speak to Ann."

Presently Janet and Ezra Easty followed Janet into the room, where John Lee sat, with a preoccupied air, while his wife handed him the Bible from a stand, and seated herself near her husband. John Lee took his spectacles from their case carefully, rubbed them slowly with his handkerchief, like one in deep thought, placed the Bible on his knee, glanced at the light, and spoke in grave tones:

"These are troublesome times. We are surrounded with perils. There are things said and done such as only the evil one can instigate. I have lived in dangerous times. I have seen enough to convince me that a providence overrules the wisest of mankind. But I have never known, nor do I believe there ever was a time when men stood more in need of the counsel and comfort given in this book—John Lee's fingers seemed to caress the cover of the well-worn Bible on his knee—than at the present time. Every home is threatened. No man or woman knows the moment they be called upon to answer charges that the vilest would blush to meet. No house is secure, no man or woman's life so free from reproach."

A loud knock on the door caused Ezra Easty to bounce on his seat. He cast a terrified look at Ann Bigger; she, too, was in a tremor. John Lee rose quietly and opened the door. Samuel Hobbs, the Marshal of Salem, entered, John Lee placed the Bible on the table at his elbow, and rose.

"You are somewhat late, if you are come on business—but you are always welcome, as you well know," said John Lee.

The Marshal did not take the seat proffered him. On the contrary, he looked like a man ill at ease. He moved his hands uneasily, and stammered when he spoke.

"The business is none of my choosing. I never did more unwilling work—never made more unwilling errand."

"Since that is the case, the sooner the business is dispatched the better. Speak out freely. The way is open to you."

"My business concerns you nearly."

"Sit you so, Samuel?" John Lee looked down and reflected. "Does it concern any one beyond those you see here?"

"No."

A silence fell upon the little circle so oppressive that Ezra Easty was sure the Marshal could hear his heart throbbing. At last John Lee, still standing with his face to the Marshal of Salem, broke the silence.

"Since it concerns all here, what may your errand be?"

The Marshal strove to clear his throat, but could not on the instant. He looked at Dorothea Lee's face. She was regarding him calmly; if there was more than reasonable surprise or curiosity, her eyes did not reveal it. Janet Lee contemplated her mother and father with an undisturbed countenance. At last the Marshal cleared his throat, and with his hand, in a voice that was far from clear, said:

"I came as a friend, rather than in my official capacity."

"For which I thank you," John Lee answered. Then leaning nearer the Marshal, he added: "Speak on. As friend, or Marshal of Salem, I am ready to listen. What may thy errand be, Master Hobbs?"

"I came to warn you are suspected of harboring witches."

Upon hearing this, Ann Bigger made the sign of the cross in the air unperceived by the others. Ezra Easty's knees trembled, his teeth were clenched, and he trembled, but he braced himself firmly on his seat, looking with shifting, fearful glances at the Marshal, the picture of abject fear.

"Witches! God save all here!" exclaimed Dorothea Lee, standing up like a woman. Janet Lee alone looked calmly from her parents to the Marshal. John Lee made a movement as though he would resent the charge, then reconsidered, turned toward his wife, and, realizing that the amazement in her countenance was reflected in his own, placed a hand heavily upon the table beside him, and sank into his seat, overpowered and horror that could find no utterance in words.

The Marshal did not anticipate the effect his words produced. He seemed, now that he had accomplished his errand, at a loss what to say or do next. He looked from one to the other, advanced slowly to the door, opened it noiselessly, turned, swept the circle with a comprehensive glance, then closing the door after him as people do when entering and leaving the presence of the dead, walked soberly away.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE SHADOWS IN THE HOUSE.

On the day following the visit of the Marshal, Ann Bigger and Ezra Easty approached each other when unobserved, casting furtive glances from side to side as they availed themselves of the first opportunity to speak.

"Did I not tell you pride would have a fall?" said Ann.

"I am glad we are of one mind, Master Hobbs. But if the people will talk-aye, and if any accuse John Lee of harboring witches—"

"Why, then, I will say 'tis false. I will state my life on it."

"Easy, Master Hobbs."

"—Tis I have forgot. There is his apprentice—but there is no other force for the mid-it would go hard with me indeed to be compelled to take any of John Lee's household in charge."

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"Do you not see? I am a witch, Arthur."

"I have said so many times."

He would have said more, but she covered his lips with her hands.

"Hush! if the Harris children said the half you have said, it would hang them. Call me anything but a witch. 'Tis no true-love term to me in these times."

Arthur Proctor replied lightly, "What is this story Ann Bigger's sister tells? Is it true your father is charged with harboring witches?"

"Oh, Arthur!" Janet exclaimed, in a burst of passion which surprised her lover, "I do not care for myself! But my father and my poor mother! Do you think there is a danger?"

To which Arthur Proctor soberly replied, considering well each word:

"We cannot tell what is or what is not a serious matter. The slightest jest may prove terrible earnest. There are those who make mountains out of mole-hills. The father of lies is loose."

"Shame on the people of Salem, then," exclaimed Janet Lee. "Who has done more for Salem than my father? Was he not foremost in the fight with the Indians? Did he not stand guard when the Salem people were in danger? Was it not Polly Turner's house when it was burning, and carried her out in his arms? There is no truer man in Salem than John Lee. No more God-fearing man or kinder. And all know there is no gentler woman—none more generous to the poor, or more considerate—than my mother, also she would not have preferred you before Giles Ellis."

"And did she so?" Arthur Proctor's face beamed with pleasure.

"Or I would not say so. My father's character, with my mother, also she would not have preferred you before Giles Ellis."

Arthur Proctor clasped her hand fervently. "Trust me to serve you both. I could not rest until I learned the truth concerning this wild rumor from your own lips. The very air is laden with poison. With malice and folly of all kinds. Old women's gossip, children's talk, matters men should not repeat in earnest, become as grave as though the breath of life depended on it. Now that I know how it lies with you I will go straight to the Marshal and get his ear. I will find him at Thomas Beadles' barn, I dare say. 'Tis there all the gossip-gatherers, such as wear women's clothes," added Proctor, scornfully.

"Beware of Giles Ellis," he asked.

"Why should I beware of Giles Ellis?" he asked.

"Because he left me with an evil look. He will not harm me. He will wreak his hatred on some one, and I know it. 'Tis in his heart, and he has the power."

"Let him try his worst with me. I defy him."

"You do well to keep up a stout heart."

"And do you, too, keep up a stout heart. Now I'll away to the tavern and see what I may."

A moment her hand was clasped firmly, then Janet Lee stood alone, sighing, saying to herself: "I must keep up a stout heart. 'Tis the only way to safety. 'Tis the only way to safety. 'Tis the only way to safety."

She pondered long, then walked to the dresser, and, taking some cakes from the plate, hastily concealed them, but not so quickly as to escape the lynx eyes of Ezra Easty, who stood near the window observing her in obedience to the command of Ann Bigger. He waited outside until Janet entered the adjoining room, then, seeing the way clear, entered and approached the dresser, smiling grimly over his discovery. He was looking at the cakes when John Lee came upon him so suddenly that the apprentice started. His master demanded, in stern tones:

"What now, Ezra?"

"I was looking at the cakes."

"Do not add lying to theft."

"I am no liar."

"There is, say no more. You only make a worse of it."

"But, Master Lee—"

"Go, go, before Dorothea comes. Cense, I say. We will discuss this after prayers."

The apprentice's face was wrathful as he seated himself in his usual corner, observing her in obedience to the command of Ann Bigger. He waited outside until Janet entered the adjoining room, then, seeing the way clear, entered and approached the dresser, smiling grimly over his discovery. He was looking at the cakes when John Lee came upon him so suddenly that the apprentice started. His master demanded, in stern tones:

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